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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 001115

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IT](#)
SUBJECT: ITALY WAITS FOR VERIFIED ELECTION RESULTS:
POLITICAL CLASS POSITIONING ITSELF

REF: ROME 1107

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Classified By: Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Opposition leader Romano Prodi has declared victory in Italy's parliamentary election while current PM Silvio Berlusconi has cautioned that infinitesimally close results call for caution until final results have been fully verified according to standard procedures. Two aspects of the vote count are being scrutinized. First, local boards are checking the math on votes counted to ensure they were properly tabulated. Also standard procedure, local boards are reviewing 43,028 contested votes in the Chamber and 39,822 contested votes in the Senate to determine voter intent. Talk of a Grand Coalition and technical governments should, in the meantime, be understood as political maneuvering, no more. END SUMMARY.

BERLUSCONI AND PRODI DIFFER ON ELECTION MEANING

12. (U) The infinitesimally close results in Italy's April 9-10 parliamentary elections (REFTEL) have center-left (CL) opposition leader Romano Prodi declaring he has the mandate to lead a stable government for the next five years. Current PM Silvio Berlusconi has publicly cautioned Prodi that he has not yet won and asked for a recount/retabulation of the results. For his part, current President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi has congratulated the Italian people for a successful election. He has, however, refused Prodi's moves for Ciampi to formally declare Prodi the PM-designate. Ciampi, whose mandate as President will end no later than May 18, has indicated that responsibility lies with the next President.

RECOUNTING/RETABULATING A CLOSE VOTE

13. (U) Results were close in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, but a difference of only 25,000 votes in the Chamber gives Prodi a super-majority. A retabulation of votes in the Chamber after the 2001 elections resulted in a swing of 57,000 votes. In light of this, Berlusconi aides tell us it is only prudent that results be verified. Only a net 12,500 votes need to be taken away from Prodi and given to Berlusconi to change the election results.

CHECKING THE MATH

14. (U) Two aspects of the vote count are being scrutinized. First, Ministry of Interior (MoI) officials are checking the math on votes counted to ensure that the votes were properly tabulated. That is, they are verifying that if community "X" recorded 100 votes for Prodi, that it was not eventually recorded as 1,000 votes, for example.

REVIEWING CONTESTED BALLOTS

15. (U) 1,102,188 votes in the Chamber were declared invalid, a decline of 66 percent compared to 2001. Of those, 448,002 were blank; 611,158 were nullified because the voter purposefully scribbled on the ballot in protest; 43,028 were contested. A contested vote means the examiners disputed the voter's intention and set the ballot aside. Comparable statistics for the Senate are: total invalid (1,093,277); nullified (565,052); contested (39,822). Total invalid votes were 60 percent less than 2001.

16. (U) As reported REFTEL, the MoI issued a press release April 11 noting that electoral results posted by the MoI are provisional and not official. District Electoral Offices and Regional Electoral Offices will review all contested ballots and pass the verified results to Court of Cassation, which will then declare those results, and the retabulated totals, official. I

SOME POLITICAL CONTEXT

17. (C) A new President of the Republic will be elected by May

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13; administrative elections for Milan, Rome, Naples, Turin and many other important cities and provinces are scheduled for May 28; and a referendum on a controversial constitutional amendment is scheduled for June/July. Though the provisional electoral results do not appear to translate into a governing majority for them, Berlusconi and Forza Italia (FI) officials are pleased with support for FI, Italy's largest. The relevant benchmark, says one FI campaign manager, is the CR's dismal performance in 2005 regional elections. Berlusconi is positioning himself and FI for the upcoming political challenges.

18. (C) Berlusconi aides have confirmed that the procedures being followed are standard and that the entire process will be over by April 28. In fact, it should be completed soon after the Easter holidays. He concluded that Berlusconi does not intend to delegitimize the results of the vote. "Simply, he wants to double-check."

COMMENT

19. (SBU) It is hardly surprising that Berlusconi would ask for an official certified count -- given the incredible closeness of the results -- before conceding victory to Prodi. At the same time, his supporters tell us he feels buoyed by an unexpectedly strong result for his own political movement. However, at this point, his talk of a Grand Coalition and other trial balloons are probably attempts to deprive Prodi of as much momentum as possible, rather than serious political proposals. Barring unexpected developments, the vote should be verified in the next week to ten days, and the path to the next government should become relatively clear. If results stay the way they are now, Prodi would get the nod to attempt to form the next government. But if 12,500 votes switch in the

center-right,s direction, it is also conceivable that
Berlusconi could be dealt back into the game. END COMMENT.
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